PUPPETS AND POETS

by

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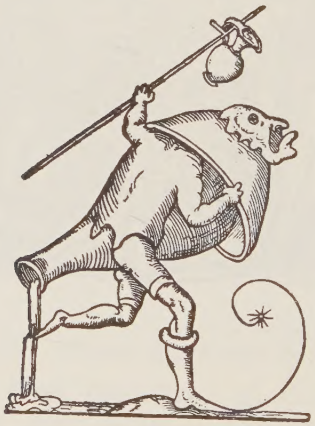

Foreword

IN 1828 Mr. J. Payne Collier began his book on "Punch and Judy" with this sentence:

"With the assistance of our friend, MR. GEORGE CRUIKSHANK, we are about to fill up a hiatus in theatrical history."

He then filled it up by writing the biography of Mr. Punch, bringing to his task all the erudition which three years later was to illumine the pages of his valuable "The History of English Dramatic Poetry to the time of Shakespeare: and the Annals of the Stage to the Restoration," a history which, by the way, we owe to a very great extent to the House of Cavendish.

This volume on Punch is one of the most delightful volumes ever produced by an English printing press; but until some other English Historian of the capability of Mr. Collier and like him attracted to the Stage* turns kindly to the whole subject (not merely treating of *one* English puppet or even of all English puppets but the whole history of the whole idea) we shall be without our information.

The learned Historian, M. Charles Magnin of the French Institute, gave the French his "Histoire||des||Marionnettes||en Europe||depuis l'antiquité jusqu'a nos jours||" in 1852, but since that time except for half a dozen made up books—made up from Magnin—the subject has not been attempted by a real Historian.†

* The only possible name of a living historian, that I can think of, is that of Mr. E. K. Chambers.

† I ought not to forget the serious contributions (1900 and 1906) to the subject by Richard Pischel, Rector of the University Halle-Wittenberg.

I come to the task not as a historian—nor to me is the first question of what is the Marionnette made, how jointed, when and where most successful, or how can it be introduced to the town, but *who holds it.*

The wood is much, the wires, the stage, the whole technique very much—but far more important is who it is that is holding the puppet. For it is he who knows how to let it move and how to let it speak—and so he it is who counts most. Consider his task—how admirable it is.

He will probably make his own puppet, and, having made it he will know its ways and not attempt to pull it here when it is going there. He will then cause it to utter foolishness or wisdom as he thinks most fitting to it. He will have to create —he could not possibly fashion an *imitation* of a well known man—Mr. Lloyd George for example—nor cause the said imitation to utter idiotic speeches. Mr. Lloyd George is no puppet—nor is Mr. Lloyd George a wire puller—no wire puller of any merit or standing descends to pull those wires attached to human beings—just as no human being permits even the most capable Democratic piece of humanity to pull his . . . leg for example.

And so *imitation*, that curse laid by Aristotle on the Arts, is ruled out of the game.

All is creation as in Poetry.

That some folk *have* ordered Puppets and have had a stage put up, is of no account at all.

When a poet sings he does it all unaided . . . that's the first rule of the game . . is it not ?

And so it is with puppetry.

You do it all or it is non-existant. After you have done it once, others come along who copy it, if it be well done, and carry scraps of your creation out on the high roads and delight thousands. That is perfectly legitimate— But until the creation

of the puppet and his wisdom and folly has moved and spoken nothing is done.

And it is this thought which has guided me as I put down these few notes.

On the Marionnette

" It is better to endure blame at the hands of the critics than to say anything that the people might possibly misunderstand."
ST. AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO.

" Peuples, formez une sainte alliance,
Et donnez-nous la main."—BERANGER.

INTRODUCTION

I.

Introduction of whom . . . and to whom ?

OF more or less strangers to one another. The gentle Public—Mr. Clunn Lewis—Mr. Harold Monro—You—myself—and Puppets.* We are nearly all strangers each to other—known vaguely without being really known.

For example, who is there of us that knows the Public ? . . .

The Public.—" Of, and concerning, the people as a whole," etc. . . . " done by or for, representing, the people, etc."

This is what our Oxford Dictionary tells us is the Public.

Therefore who is there who knows, or is known by, the Public, for who can know " the people as a whole " ? . . . think of it . . . the whole of the People !

" There never were in the world two opinions alike, no more than two hairs or two grains ; the most universal quality is diversity."—(Montaigne.)

Mr. Clunn Lewis.—Does the Public know him ?—does he know the Public ?—does he know you ?—or you him ? Does any Biographical Dictionary inform the Public who he is ?

* I have not included Patrons. I exclude 'em purposely—we all know them too well. " Is not a patron, my lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and when he has reached the ground encumbers him with help ? " (Dr. Johnson.)

Mr. Harold Monro.—Well, we all know him—but then *we* are not the Public—the people, and we are not Mr. Clunn Lewis.

You and I.—We know ourselves—not very well but better than the Public knows us—or Mr. Lewis, or Mr. Monro.

And finally,

The Puppets.—These know nothing and are practically known to nobody. And this is why an introduction which brings us all together is timely.

The only *difficile* members are the Public . . . and the Puppets ; because they are the two strongly opposed elements in the party, and the two strong parties of the group.

They do not know each other even after having lived together for centuries in every possible part of the globe.

For it can hardly be called *knowing* a race of such antiquity as the Puppets when the only sign of recognition which proceeds from the Public on hearing them mentioned is a laugh.

And yet to put in one word for both these strangers, that laugh is worthy to be analysed. It's about the best laugh on earth. It is fresh, and if it doesn't speak volumes it breathes little poems.

So after all, Public and Puppets are known to one another in that the Public willingly accepts the little people *without knowing them.*

And now that the ice has broken itself, you and I need not make any difficulty. You begin to know me, and I am delighted to begin to know you.

Only Mr. Monro and Mr. Clunn Lewis * are left over, and if only they will come to know each other, you and I and the Public will know the Puppets better. I will explain why later.

So that the Introduction hasn't been such a stiff one after all. . . .

* But even now you don't know who Mr. Clunn Lewis is. He is a puppet showman—they cannot number over 20 in all England—and he is one of the very oldest—a professional not an amateur—and this is my reason for wanting to see him with us all—with the Poets and the Public.

II.

I CAN only write you disjointed passages on this most extraordinary subject. A History is what you need. No such History exists in England, but in France and Italy and Germany Puppets have had their Chronicles written by Magnin, Maindron, Molmenti, Pischel, and many others. I am preparing a little book which I hope will be ready this autumn, but like any other subject this one has to be studied without haste, and not alone by books and diagrams, so as to come at last to recognise what it is about the Puppets that has held the attention of Asia and Europe for many centuries.

III.

WHEN I was in London in the Summer of 1920 it seems I put my foot in it once more by saying that I thought the English Stage about the worst in existence. This offended those who felt that they were in part responsible for the English Stage.

Why it should offend them is what puzzles me.

They are not responsible for it's being so bad—they are to be held responsible for it's being the best in existence. Still, if there is anyone on the English Stage who feels that he has shirked his responsibility as an artist, then I can well understand how my words spoken without any personal feeling at all can have unintentionally winged their way and touched a sensitive spot —touched the spot itself.

IV.

SO when I was in London I saw a number of old friends and made a number of new ones, and together we made a few enquiries and learnt more than we had ever learnt before about the English Stage and *why* it was what it is.

It is not the fault of the actors—nor of the dramatists : it is no one's fault, for no one is really responsible. The men are

remarkable, the ladies extraordinary. All are all that is needed except for one thing—no one is in his right place.

Everyone is "free."

Caliban (*drunkenly*): Freedom! hey-day! hey-day, freedom! freedom, hey-day, freedom!

Stephano (a drunken butler): O brave monster! lead the way. (Shakespeare.)

There are dramatists writing (as the best of them acknowledges) "a lot of words," who should be writing a few words. They write a lot instead of a little because they are out of place. They are free—free to write what they like—how they like—as much as they like—no matter what *we* like. No one to obey but themselves, they are encouraged by this new nonsense of liberty to go further and obey nothing.

Hang the unities—to the deuce with catastrophe and climax—pouff to form—paff to style.

Caliban (drunkenly): Freedom, hey-day! hey-day, freedom! freedom, hey-day, freedom!

Stephano: O brave monster! lead the way.

V.

THEN the Actors. Once in the old days of slavery the Actors thought a good deal about the magic treasures they possessed. These were *pronunciation*—(especially the wonders of the vowels A.E.I.O.U.) and *carriage*—especially the carriage of the head and the manipulation of all its magical parts—the eyes, the brows and the mouth. . . . Voice and Movement.

In those pre-liberty loving days* the actors pronounced their vowels carefully.

"Juliet," they said. To-day they say "Jewlyette." . . .

They said "Oh": to-day they say "Ow."

They said "I hate": to-day they say "Oi hite."

* "Quand une fois on a trouvé le moyen de prendre la multitude par l'appât de la liberté, elle suit en aveugle, pourvu qu'elle en entende seulement le nom." —Bossuet.

No longer are they exact, but inixact.

In those days of the manacle and the yoke they walked like princes and they posed like gods. If the eyes rolled a bit, what matter : at least there was something to roll. The lips, the brows, betokened a sense of power—the power of *expression*, the reward of *experience not shirked*—and a lot beside.

But Liberty, giving everyone a short cut, allows the actor to skip experience—in fact any real suffering of anything at all, like experiencing life as in the old sock-and-buskin days might be a great danger—commercially. It might once more tempt the actors to become *versatile*.* They might come to be able to interpret every kind of character from Hamlet down to Diggory

* *Theatrical Custom*.—From " The Times " Weekly Edition. July 16, 1920.

Mr. Justice McCardie delivered a considered judgment in favour of Mr. A....B...., the actor, in his suit against Mr. de C....D...., the theatre manager, for damages for breach of a contract for the performance of a leading part of Alan Camp. Mr. de C....D.... deprived him of that part and offered him another. The plaintiff refused to accept that offer. The Judge held that Mr. E....F.... had authority to make the contract, and that there was custom established in the theatrical profession that whenever an actor was engaged for a part in a play at a West-End Theatre in London the engagement was for the run of the piece. His Lordship in holding that the plaintiff was right in refusing the alternative part, made the following comments on the calling of the actor :—

An actor's life, he said, differed much from the life of a business man. If the latter bought well and sold at a profit, he might be indifferent to the approval of the public and might smile at the asperity of critics. But an actor lived on whisper of public approbation. He might use the language of Pope and say " A breath revives him or a breath o'erthrows." He must therefore choose his parts. He must consult the tastes and whims of the public. It was well and cogently observed by Dr. Johnson that " Those who live to please must please to live." *Versatility was lightly spoken of by laymen. That quality was not only permissible but often requested in the days of stock companies. An actor might then be anything from Hamlet to a Jester*, and of him it might well have been said that " He was a man so various that he seemed to be, not one, but all mankind's epitome." *But the case was now quite different under modern theatrical methods*, with the striking development of specialised reputations in West-End Theatres. *It was now only an actor of dominant distinction who safely embarked on the perilous seas of unchecked versatility*. But actors in the position of the plaintiff must choose his characters. He could not be a histrionic Autolycus,

and be hailed as other " Keans," or, what would be worse, ONE actor might come to this power.

That must be provided against, especially in these days of Democracy ;—everyone must be on a level ; and so the lower the level the more will be on it. Whoop ! . . .

Caliban (drunkenly) : Freedom, hey-day ! hey-day, freedom ! freedom, hey-day, freedom !

Stephano : O brave monster ! lead the way.

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a mere snapper-up of unconsidered parts. Dramatic reputation was a sensitive, fragile thing. (*The italics are mine.—E. G. C.*)

The same Case as reported in " The Stage," July 8, 1920 :—

Mr. Norman McKinnel, chairman of the Actors' Association, corroborated this evidence as to custom. He also stated that it would be most unwise for an actor who had devoted himself to a particular class of character or part, as in the case of the plaintiff, to play a part like that of George Green.

Mr. G.... H.... I...., who played Joe Garvin, said he thought plaintiff would have been ill-advised to have taken the part of George Green, as he was unsuited in type and temper.

Cross-examined : Would it do any harm to show a little versatility ?

Witness : I should say it would in London.

Mr. Justice McCardie : What are the areas of activity which are concerned in the ultimate presentation of a play to the public. You have the author ; he has some say, hasn't he ?—*The Witness :* Yes, my lord.

The Judge : And the extent of his say, I suppose, depends upon his position in the creative world ?

The Witness : Frequently.

The Judge : Who comes next ?

The Witness : It is very difficult to lay down any rule on the subject. It so frequently happens that different people have the say. Sometimes it is the gentleman who is financially backing the venture, and the manager may be merely a figure-head. (*Lovely !—isn't it.—E. G. C.*)

Plaintiff agreed that sometimes the functions of manager and producer overlapped.

. . . . . .

This long Footnote was necessary because it really offers us the amazing spectacle of Actors telling Judges that to be versatile nowadays might lead to losing an engagement ; and it offers a first-class opportunity to the Puppet to step in where the Angels fear to go treading.—E. G. C.

VI.

I NEVER thought we should come to such a state of panic, or English actors prefer to keep an engagement at the loss of our versatility.

But this is where the Marionnette does step in—and is quite willing to keep the flag flying until actors have recovered themselves.

No performer could be quite as versatile as a Puppet—for a Puppet can even change his head ; can have three separate selves, and all these can, if needs be, appear on the scene at once.

So then for England, Puppets would come as a blessing, coming in the nick of time to show the way once more to their old comrades the actors.

Let us be fair. The Actors—the best of them—even those who don't join Unions, are having a hard tussle. The times and their unruly fellow-actors who don't stand by them, all seem against allowing the actor to bring what he can to England.

Faddists form themselves into " Leagues " or " Societies " and " Unions," and think that by having a good talk once a month and an International Conference once a year, they, the Faddists, can revive a whole craft, . . . the craft of acting. They cannot. They may patch up or even Reform the Profession as a business, but no more.

First of all these Leagues do next to nothing, and when the great gatherings are convoked, who appears there ? One really representative man or woman of the new movement ? Barely one. Mr. Barker might turn up—but who else ? One needs at least ten Mr. Barkers present to make it even " pay,"—and more than this to rid it of its faddism or its commercialism and get to action. But an unfortunate objection offers itself. The eminent men and women who have made the Theatre possible for the newer generation somehow cannot be persuaded to come to these " International Conferences." Why, I really cannot say.

So nothing is really done to help the best actors to recover what is being lost to them month by month. They admit the loss of that important stronghold—their old *versatility*. They have admitted other losses—and they continue to retreat.

Now the little Puppet steps forward and offers to hold the whole line—and he can do it.

And I want the Actor to realise that in the Puppet he has the dearest of old comrades and not a hated enemy, or a competitor. And this too is where Mr. Clunn Lewis steps in: he is one of the links between actor and Puppet—even the smallest link in the longest chain should not be forgotten—should not be broken.

VII.

IT is an absurd fact that the Western actor has treated Puppets with such disdain that he has forced the public to ask, "Does he then fear them?" No, it's not that—what should he fear? No, it is something different.

He sees in the Puppet a parody of himself.

Now *there is no parody at all: there is no resemblance whatever.*

These are little people—not actors. They are comparable with men perhaps, but not with the actor. They are the truest friends of actors because they offer them a great deal and ask nothing in return.

Let me try and show what is offered.

Tuition is offered.

The Puppet is the Actor's Primer. Architects have Vitruvius, Palladio and a dozen others: musicians have Rameau and a dozen others: painters have Leonardo, Cennini and a dozen others: writers have the Dictionary—and actors have the Puppet.

I hope that should this CHAPBOOK meet the eye of any actor he will not think that I am pulling his leg—making a bad joke about what is to all of us a very serious and a very interesting matter . . . and to me my whole breath and life.

For what we are touching on here is a constructive point. I

have flung my challenge to the actor years ago. . . . and he has never taken it up ; . . . it had the weight of too many centuries on it to lift easily. As we know, the sword Excalibur was not drawn out of the stone by everyone, however physically strong he might be. I am sure that pretty soon an actor will come along who will lift my glove as easily as he will act his own Dramas, and as gracefully . . . but at present it lies where I flung it.

But that was some years back, and I am now going to give the actor a few hints if he will permit me . . . (a few wrinkles they called it in 1555) . . . as to how I think he might get the best of me.

The first of these is that he renew his acquaintance with the Puppets.

Never travel without one. Have one made—let it be three feet high. See that it's well balanced and carved by some really good wood-carver; have it carefully strung—and put on a cunning stick. For the stick is the soul of the Puppet.

Then practise with this in front of a glass.

Hold it easily, letting the feet just touch the carpet.

Raise the whole figure twelve times and lower it smoothly, stopping the downward motion precisely when the feet retouch the carpet. Do this a dozen times every morning and every afternoon before your other exercises.

The next thing to do is to turn it to the right, then to the left, without allowing it to swing. The next thing is to make it kneel : the next, to lie down sideways.

These five exercises you must do for a fortnight.

When you pass to further exercises you must not stop these first five.

Your Puppet must have six strings : he can have eight, and more are not prohibited ; but if you care to listen to me and do as I say, you will have only six.

Two for the head ; that is to say, one behind each ear. Two

for the back, that is, one on each shoulder ; (these carry the weight). Two for the hands, that is to say, one on each wrist.

Now it is no one but a born actor who can really properly understand a Puppet : so that while others may test their hand at the craft, only those of them who are born actors will be masters of this craft.

And at this point a little,—a very little—History will not be out of place.

THE HISTORY OF PUPPETS

THERE are several kinds, classes, genera, sorts of Puppets. Those which I know of, that is, those which I have seen, are the following : Round figures and flat figures.

1. *Round* (A) Marionnettes.
   (B) Guignols or Burattini.
2. *Flat.* (C) Shadow Figures.

(1) Round Puppets.

A.—*Marionnettes* are Puppets made of any material you like ; having as a rule a head, a body, arms, hands, legs and feet ; articulated, sometimes comparatively flat ; generally round. Hung from above by wires, cords, threads, iron bars, chains, or what you will. Any size.

B.—*Guignols* or *Burattini*, are Puppets made of any material you like, having as a rule only head and hands affixed to their costume.* Held from below, not hung from above. Held as a glove when drawn on to the hand.

* Sometimes they have legs, (the lower half), and feet.

(2) Flat Puppets.

A.—*Shadow Figures* are Puppets made of any transparent material you like, having as a rule a head, body, arms, hands, legs, feet; sometimes articulated; held from below.

Or instead of the above classification they might be tabulated as follows:—

1.—Flat Puppets.
2.—Round Puppets.
A.—Marionnettes suspended from above.
B.—Burattini and Shadow Figures held from below.

Costume.

A.—Puppets in which the costume is part of their construction.
B.—Puppets which are dressed after they are made.

Articulation.

A.—Partly articulated Puppets.
B.—Non-articulated Puppets.

Puppets for Shadow Play.

A.—Their substance visible only.
B.—Their shadow visible only.
C.—Both substance and shadow visible.

Materials from which Made.

Paper, *cardboard*, *hide*, zinc, *wood*, *cloth*, papier-mâché, gesso.*

The Countries from which They Come.

Flat Figures.—From *China*, *Java*, *Bali*, Syria, Arabia, North Africa, *India*, *Turkey*, *France*, *England*.

* Those that I have *seen*, or *seen photographs of*, I have in this and the following paragraphs, printed in italics.

I mention this, believing that a Historian likes his readers to be aware of that which he has actually seen, and of that about which he has only heard say.

Round Figures.—From *China*, *Java*, *Burmah*, Siam, Persia, Turkistan, *Japan*, *Samarkand*, *Italy*, *France*, *India*, *Germany*, *England*, *Belgium*, *Sicily*, *Russia*.

The most important division is that which I have put first, and which separates them into Flat or Round Puppets.

Both Flat and Round can be suspended or held, costumed or not, articulated or partly articulated. But whereas Flat Marionnettes can be used in substance or shadow, in the case of the Round Marionnettes it is only the substance that can be shown.

END OF THE HISTORY.

VIII.

THE Puppets taught acting to the great schools of Eastern actors, just as Fossils taught sculpture to the Eastern sculptors.

Lest this statement refuse to stand without a prop or two, let me put the props.

The Puppet is a model of man in motion.

The Puppet is not the moving statue. Statues are not made to move : they are to be at rest.

Puppets are therefore not statues.

They are, let me repeat, precisely models of man in motion. When they move they are to perfect the movements of man, even as sculpture perfects the form of man.*

To perfect anything we either add something or take something away.

For example, to make dinner more perfect to the poor man we certainly add a little cheese. It would make the rich man's dinner more perfect if we eliminated a course or two. Art is very like this. If the puppet has been made by a man rather

* I refer to the truest kind ; yet we must remember that even the Puppet can have his joke ;—then he parodies man . . . but *man*, not the actor. That is not allowed.

too rich in mechanical skill he has been over-elaborated, and we may safely take something away . . . reduce his strings . . . and stop his wriggling ; but if the puppet-maker has given us a lump of a figure which can move no better than a dutch doll we can certainly add something. In each case we shall be what I call perfecting it.

Now our two Puppets which we have imagined, . . . the lumpish one and the highly mechanical one . . . will each of them perfect the movements of man.

If they do not, then you have not added enough ; or you have taken away too much.

It's the law, you see, and it's that which is so difficult to learn.

But once you have made a Puppet and taught yourself *to allow it* to move (and it's *that* and nothing else ; I mean *you* don't move it ; you let it move itself ; that's the art) * . . . once you have done these two things I promise you, if you are a born artist, the world is in for a very great treat. The Idea of Man in motion—in perfect motion, will be seen for the first time in a generation.

And I am distinctly under the impression that it is the Actor who is going to bring this treat to the world. The Actor is not sophisticated—not mechanical—and, sick beyond words of the stickiness of the Cinema, he will turn with delight to the Puppet ;

* By the way, I have a Puppet which (if only I knew how to let him move) does really move so as to cause delight. I had him with me in Roma, and some of my friends who came to see me will forget me but I am sure they will never forget him.

I don't know where you are now, P——s, but wherever you are, remember to say what you saw. The beautiful Imperatrice too, I recall how she touched this figure. Another lady only saw something mechanical in it—but then she was an actress. S——, I recollect, instantly forgot the beauty of the thing and leaped to look at the mechanism as a railway official looks at the tickets. How like our Russian Balletists was that single action ! He suggested to me a hungry man who has never seen a loaf of bread for weeks, and who pounces on it ravenously.

I used to produce my remarkable Puppet in order to read the nature of each new-comer.

he will overhaul the whole craft and give us what we want to see.* At present, except for Mr. Lewis and a dozen or so other professionals, the Puppets are in the hands of amateurs—we know what that means.

Amateurs are a thin-skinned lot of rogues, anyhow : . . . Bless their finikin ways—their pompous silences, their fearful pretension—but may the actors rescue the dolls from their lifeless fingers without delay.

IX.

HOW great is the need of the actor-artist as director of these magical little Theatres which await him in the near future !

But remember, not to give credit to the ancients for having done as remarkably as we shall ever do, and this in spite of all the modern inventions, in spite of their living in the dark ages, . . . not to give them this credit is to cheat ourselves out of all they discovered and to arrive poorer than we set out.

Follow me a moment.

We hear much to-day about modern discoveries, inventions ; and some of these are very remarkable ; . . . those for saving life—time—money and so forth : the train, the telephone, telegraph, lighthouses, motor cars, photography, X-rays, . . . and a hundred new wonders.

But now, without a word against any of these time- and money-saving inventions, let us glance at some of the inventions which, costly though they be, are, we may suppose, used to save time and to save money, and let me say what I consider is lost. . . .

In the modern Theatre (in its Puppet Theatre as well as in Drury Lane) we find improvements for raising and lowering sceneries and for lighting these sceneries . . . and ever since the Italians began to invent these things the aim has been the

* Saying this—speaking of The Actor I would not have the tremulous types who are nervous as to whether they will get £6 or only £5 a week imagine I refer to them. Such are not actors . . . they are twopennies.

same ; which is to pile scene upon scene, dazzling the eyes of the spectators ; and therefore mechanical appliances had to be invented adequately to support the designer of the scenes in his ever-growing desire to *change the scene*. The desire to change is what possessed the Bibienas, for example. That celebrated Italian family of scene designers of the eighteenth century must one day be introduced to us in a volume worthy of their staggering achievements.

A family of eight, seven of whom were either Theatre architects or scenographers or even both, and six of these of surpassing merit, three of them brilliant and learned beyond any others in art and one of them a genius, . . . these seven men went from Bologna to Roma, to Madrid, to Vienna, to Prague, to Dresden, to Bayreuth, to St. Petersburg, to Nancy, to almost every Court in Europe except London, and there produced spectacles which were the wonder of the age.

They achieved in the way of scenic splendour something phenomenal.

Anything like Mr. Arthur Collins' stupendous achievements at Drury Lane ?

Well, to be just to Mr. Collins and to the Bibienas, we should have to see their work side by side : A Frith and a Bellini can be seen side by side, but, alas, Stage Spectacles cannot.

Yet this can be said of Drury Lane.

It has far more costly mechanical means at its command than the Theatres of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries ever had. The early mechanic created machines which with little change except increase in price are used by us nowadays. But our Circular Turntable Stage and our rising and sinking bridges, worked by electricity or by hydraulic action, these are a big advance . . . mechanically. Our electric light is too. (The circular stage comes from Japan, by the way ; but the motive power is American.)

And what is the gain to the spectators ? The gain is exactly this : . . . *an enormous loss*.

We workmen gain, maybe ; . . . but the spectators lose.

For it is not any gain to an Art to have such a force as electricity at your disposal unless you have the power to control it. And the power needed is considerable. It may take an exceptional artist of very clear vision anything between thirty and forty years to acquire such a power.

Consider a moment more.

Take the case of an average horse ; . . . or a strong fish. Ask anyone acquainted with riding bronchos and with angling for salmon how long it takes to learn to master these tricky creatures.

The sea : . . . ask a sailor how long it takes to master that.

And electric light . . . how long ? Do you think the electric light is mastered by turning a switch and then turning it off. And because you can turn it slowly as well as quickly you have no more mastered the tremendous thing than you have walked when you have been carried in your nurse's arms.

And so, while we have wonderful instruments to-day in our Theatres, we perhaps do not achieve the half that the Puppets achieved in 1700 ; or Peruzzi and Serlio in 1500 ; or Brunelleschi in 1400.

It would need a volume to explain how and where we have lost our art of scenic control while acquiring more and better instruments. Yet it could be easily written, as the documents for such a book are copious.

My point is this : You may be thinking that the Puppet and its stage is only a mechanical affair after all. I want you to consider it as an art, and a fine art. If you do not, you will only delay the growth of an admirable thing . . . admirable from every possible point of view.

I know your objections. One of them is that Puppets cannot perform Shakespeare. That fact, were it true, does not convict Puppets.

M. Anatole France thinks Puppets can perform Shakespeare,

and he says so.* But M. Anatole France holding an opinion contrary to that held by you is nothing. There are at least a hundred others who hold a hundred separate and contrary opinions to you both.

But I join no one if he hugs little prejudices. The fact of the Puppets being able to perform Shakespeare is as unimportant to me as the positive proof that they cannot. What counts is that in the Puppet we have all those elements necessary to *interpretation* and *in the Puppet stage every element necessary to a creative and a fine art.*

Suppose Puppets cannot perform Shakespeare, this is not a reason to suppose they cannot deal with the Heroic as easily as with the matter of fact.

I know it has been fashionable ever since the creation of Dogma, and that began fairly early, to state with emphasis or with a smile glibly or sadly or comfortably or coquettishly that there is no such thing as a Devil who is sometimes good or a God who is sometimes queer.

We invented the two, and we don't like to think we got it wrong.

And so with lesser things . . . with the portraits of God and Devil, with their symbols , . . even with Puppets.

Dogma, like everything else, was the invention of the Mr. Bernard Shaws of the age. It's pleasant in a way—but oh, so unpractical. The high priests and the low priests went in for Dogma ; for while it appeared to liberate the people, it was all the time enslaving them and holding back . . . and from good motives too, . . . the very best priestly motives.

The others,—the artists—always old chums of the priests but never priestly themselves, were always so busy doing things,

* " M. Henry Signoret's marionnettes have just given us Shakespeare's ' Tempest.' It is hardly an hour since the curtain of the Petit Théâtre fell upon the harmonious group of Ferdinand and Miranda. I am still under the spell, and, as Prospero says, I ' yet taste some subtleties o' the isle.' What a charming sight ! And how true it is that exquisite things, when they are naïve, are doubly exquisite."

dabbing here, polishing that, never asking why, . . . so active, that in their runnings to and fro they had never time to close the door. " *The Door must* be either open or shut " ; . . . That is exactly what the Artist with a sigh or a laugh knows is untrue, unreal and unpractical.

Laughed at for being unpractical for ages, he seems to know a thing or two which all the wisdom of the ages has never suggested to the rest of the world ; and one of these things is that when a door is not a door it is generally a-jar. . . . An essential piece of knowledge, although but a grain. And then he lets live and yet lives . . . actually does not die :—you know what I mean.

Not so with the high priest.

Having first shut the door—locked it—chained it—sealed it and smeared garlic across the edges—he turns to his scroll and with his stylus pen he goes it hell-for-leather to prove that a jar is only a bit of a clay pitcher . . . (pitcher, where was he ? —avoiding the accursed name of Æsop which that instant leaps to his mind ;) and that a door can never never be a jar.

For which he feels God blesses him, . . . and may all such silly-billies ever be blessed.

But he grows bold under such golden beatitude ; . . . bold and rich ; and he rashly asserts in his own particular paradoxical way that, though he will live, he'll be blowed if you or I shall live unless we can embrace his own dear, if bland, Dogma.

Many do so at once. Many find it fine—and profitable. But we don't : not for any profound reason, but for the queer one that we can't. In short, we artists can't take sides.

We are aware that there *seem* to be sides to things, but no sooner do we arrive at one side and make sure it's there than we see another beyond ; and lastly we arrive at the side we started from. And even there we are not secure. Even there we cannot camp and mount the rostrum and dogmatize, . . . for we are not there yet.

Awful, isn't it ? . . . .

Yet the High Priests are always " there," always announcing brick walls—safe arrivals—sofas—ahhh——

And while preaching of this and of that to the people, of mighty things, they are often pleased to potter of an afternoon. —to potter around the playground and to pat a Puppet on the head with a kind phrase here and a kind phrase there ; and here a phrase and there a phrase, and everywhere a phrase. Saying unto them, " Come hither, little Poppets ! Mind and see that ye act *nothing* but Heroes for eight centuries,—*ca p i to*—Act anything else, and, by God ——" the rest of the kindly phrase is unpublishable . . . so really human is the good man.

Or another time he calleth the Little Figure to him and saith : " Act Vulgarity for three centuries ; or ——" but you get my meaning.

If you don't, it's this :

That it seems a kind of passionate joy to these intellectual priests to prevent everything from being what it is—perfectly balanced.

To-day, too kind, too flattering to a Puppet, the good man tells it that it is to act nothing but the Heroic . . . to-morrow, too rude, it is to act only the mean.

X.

NOW the Puppet can act Hero—God—idea—butcher—vegetarian—bloke—and Devil . . . the Heroic and the mean and the in-between. . . . Is that clear ? . . .

Everyone is born with the sense of vision . . . only the Intellectual obstinately wrings the neck of his vision year after year, and then it comes about that there are only a comparatively few cobblers, carpenters, journalists, nurses, painters, laundresses, cab-drivers, poets, doctors, architects, dramatists, boat-builders,

idlers, photographers or cooks with a good ordinary vision, and hardly a single Prince or Priest with a scrap of it.*

XI.

IT has interested men and women in France, in Germany, to have Puppets performing in their houses:—I hardly think it will interest English men and women.

It is natural that Voltaire, Madame George Sand and Prince Esterhazy should have had little playhouses in their Châteaux. I imagine it is unlikely (because unnatural) that Dr. Johnson, George Eliot or the eighth Duke of Devonshire should have pretended to understand these things sufficiently to have them at home.

Yet England is the Land of Lands for the Puppet. Not as a private dandified and exotic fancy, but as a rollicking public diversion.

For the whole essence of the Puppet is English, its slap-dash and stiffness, and there is no one fitted to understand the staid grace of the Marionnette better than these Englishmen who are all staid grace. And since the more English Englishmen are graceful,—studiedly so—it comes about that many hundreds of thousands of Englishmen respond naturally *en masse* to the Puppet when he performs in Public.

Nor is it likely that an Englishman will ever come to write or speak of the Puppet with as much understanding as did Anatole France, Voltaire, or Kleist; but they can all, and all do, respond to it instinctively—as English Public.

* I use the term "priest," not to express a man who has "taken Holy Orders." I have no knowledge of the Church other than that obtained through its charitable acts to the poor.

By "Priest" I mean your dogmatic writer.—Perhaps Tolstoi, perhaps Shaw: not Goethe or Byron.

If it is not clear give it up—for thinking won't make it clearer. You've got to *see* these sorts of truths straight off: and the reason our good Intellectual doesn't see it, is because he sees mighty little—he thinks so hard he positively fails to see.

I cannot therefore account for the disappearance of Punch and Judy—the last of the English Puppets.

These two Puppet figures are not Marionnettes ; they are *Burattini* (*see* page 15). They perform a tragic comedy. Punch is not a genial figure at all, . . . not genial as Fagiolini of Bologna, who also lays about with the stick a bit lustily ; . . . if he is a joke of a man, he is a grim joke. Don Juan is the type he is supposed to represent. Those who care to read all about him should look up the book by Mr. Payne Collier with illustrations by Mr. George Cruikshank. Punch, having killed child and wife, meets the Devil, and, after a terrific combat, comes off victorious. This did appeal to the English once upon a time, . . . but was not shown in the fine mansions to select gatherings but in the street and to the crowd. Abroad Pulcinella and Polichinelle (and these are hump-backed figures of the same stock as Punch), were to be found in the ladies' convents in Venice in the eighteenth century, and in Voltaire's salon.

Other puppets dwelt for years in the Château of Eisenstadt and at the Château of Nohant. For the first a theatre was specially built and Haydn was engaged to come and dwell with them, and composed for marionnettes many an operetta in the course of thirty years spent at Eisenstadt. " He was particularly fond of the marionnette theatre," says his Historian. Yet Haydn was a serious man.

A visitor wrote of the performances in 1782 :

" The Château stands quite solitary, and the prince sees nobody but his officials and servants, and strangers who come hither from curiosity. He has a puppet-Theatre, which is certainly unique in character. Here the grandest operas are produced. One knows not whether to be amazed or to laugh * at seeing ' Alceste,' ' Alcides,' etc., put on the stage with all due solemnity and played by puppets. His orchestra is one of the best I ever heard, and the great Haydn is his Court and Theatre composer. He employs a poet for his singular Theatre, whose

* Then one might bark.

humour and skill in suiting the grandest subjects for the stage, and in parodying the gravest effects, are often exceedingly happy."

For the troupe at the Château de Nohant Madame George Sand was ever willing to write plays,—not for a single performance for one week and party, but regularly, during the course of fifteen to twenty years.*

Voltaire, always a serious spectator at play or pantomime, offered hospitality to the Puppets at Sceaux: the chatty Madame de Graffigny when staying at the Château wrote to a friend:

"December 16th 1738.

"I have just left the Marionnettes which have much amused me; they are very good. They acted the play in which Polichinelle's wife thinks she can kill her husband by singing *fagnana! fagnana!* It was a ravishing pleasure to hear Voltaire say seriously that the play is very good; it is true that it is as good as can be for such people. It is stupid to laugh at such silly stuff, isn't it? no matter! I laughed. The Theatre is very pretty, but the room is small. A Theatre and a room for marionnettes at Cirey! Oh, it is comical!"

This need not surprise us, this tone of condescension strained to the bursting point: . . . it is the tone generally assumed by those who for some unknown reason have found in some one Puppet (or in many) a certain resemblance to themselves . . . or it is just a natural damnation which has been always with them and will be with us till luck removes them.

The perfect Puppet resembles us all . . . and he who would create a troupe of perfect comic and tragic Puppets would unconsciously make figures which would were it possible put down the mighty from their seats and exalt the humble and meek.

But while saying this I would not have you take me to say that the maker of Puppets can *consciously* set out to make us better men and women by showing us ourselves in the guise of these little people.

Anyone who sets out consciously to do so can only fail. This

* See "The Marionette" published 1918. Box 444, Florence, Italy.

is what can reassure us all that the Craft is not an asset in the hocus-pocus box of tricks of the missionary.

The craft is solely for the Artist.

Never was there such a craft ready to the hand of the Dramatist ; and it seems almost to have been made for the English Actor-Dramatist.

One Dramatist, M. Maeterlinck, calls his earliest and best Dramas " Drames pour Marionnettes." He, a Belgian, had seen much of the Puppets. In one of the towns of Belgium, Liège, no less than forty-five theatres were to be found just previous to the war. It would be interesting if some one could tell us whether these theatres still exist or whether the figures are scattered and destroyed . . . and whether the people still demand their ancient shows.

In a sense M. Maeterlinck's earliest dramas are for Puppets, for the action of his plays seems like the slow and deliberate gesture of all Puppets . . . each seems to move as a somnambulist.

But while M. Maeterlinck has found something for us and has given dramatists a very valuable hint as to what he found in the puppets of Belgium, he has stopped when it was of paramount importance for him and for us that he should have gone on.

The Russian Ballet has often parodied puppets . . . some of their dancers finding, as M. Mazurier found in 1825, that the stiffness of the wooden figures yielded some good " tips " for a clever man to bamboozle the crowd of up-to-dates. So the Ballet bamboozled London, Paris, once more with this seventh-rate trick of yesterday.

One of the soundest truths which exhales from the existence of Marionnettes is that man is not to be manipulated. Here are dolls—here beautiful things to make and to move . . . have you still some superfluous energy ? . . . then make another.

It is so sound, this exercise. It is so crazy that other exercise of playing with the living wires.

If we all saw more manipulation of Puppets on little Stages (and

the hours spent in such Theatres are not wearisome but merry ones), there would anyhow be a far *quieter* world to manage . . . because hundreds of thousands of people in all the countries and cities would cease to have any desire to pull the wires, would stop chattering, and would leave it to those who are placed in a position to rule, and empowered and paid for it.

To disapprove—to interfere—to meddle,—these are three troublesome ancient desires which need food.—The Puppets are the most delicious food for these desires.

A healthy pastime, easily, cheaply enjoyed, is the Game of Puppets—the Theatre of Puppets.

Have I already spoken of how little it costs to make a puppet show? Conceive it for yourselves.

It is cheaper than the Cinematograph.

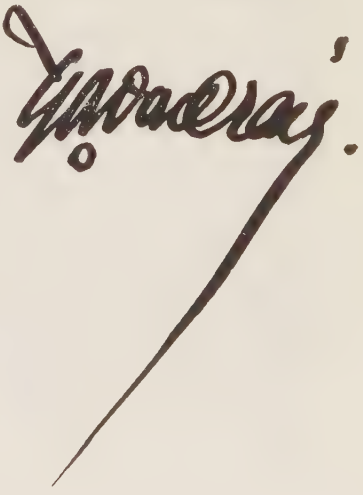
This is one of the reasons why I fancy it is going to spread far and wide.

It was once a power—now I think it will be a thousand times greater power. I imagine it all over the western world before long.

¶ But remember it is already a Fine art, already has its rules—is no unknown thing—nothing like poker-work.

¶ Take it up—but beware how you touch it. Take it up seriously and without fear. Fear only if you can lay it down.

¶ Be professional at it.



Postscript

TWO hundred years ago in Japan—in Osaka—the Ayatsuri or puppet-theatre flourished. It flourishes there to-day. I have no notion how many hundreds of years the Shadow puppet theatre of Java, of China, and of Turkey have flourished. But if you wish to guess take a look at the five Japanese drawings showing the complicated parts of a single figure. It is needless for me to comment on any of these Eastern simplicities or elaborations ; they are not more marvellous than the spirit of the lands which gave them their existence. Mr. Yone Noguchi can tell you all about the Japanese puppet and indeed has already written something. If you will turn to "The Graphic" of December 6th, 1913, you will find it. Of puppets he says "It is our human fault that we cannot always clarify our mind and intention on account of the disturbance of our senses ; it is the blessing of puppets that they can use their full force of silence to the best of advantage" . . . "two or three, even five, people are needed to make one doll play or act" . . . "the admission is as high as for any regular theatre" . . . "the famous Bunraku theatre, where the *Gidayu* singers like Daija Settsu always secure a big house with their beautiful voices,* even without speaking of the marvellous acting of the puppets themselves."

Another writer from Japan—I suppose a European—wrote a series of articles in the "Times," December 8, 15, 18, 1919, and January 2, 1920 ; you would find them interesting.

In front of me are some photographs from Japan showing a long puppet stage—(not a barn—not a make-shift—not I mean anything vamped up like the Bear Pits England offered to Shakespeare or the Tennis courts the French bestowed on Molière)—a stage made for the purpose of puppetry which is not to hold any MIRROR down to nature, but to do something which

* A beautiful voice over there pronounces its vowels correctly—A. E. I. O. U. remember !—not cockney twang.

Poets understand and which I begin to be sure actors are going to understand. By the side of the stage is a wing branching into the auditorium; on this, seated cross-legged, with a ceremonial poet's-desk before each are the four *gidayu* or *musunié-gidayu* (girl chanters . . . who are now more numerous than the male chanters), and near by are the players of the *samisen*. On the stage itself, we see the puppets noble of bearing, beautiful faces—their littleness lending a sense of distance—a kind of century distance—to the whole impression, and behind each puppet the three or four men holding it.

In the auditorium we count about 2,000 persons or even more. Very serious are the faces of the spectators—who are of all ages.

* * * * *

LEAVING Japan and entering Roma, we see "*Teatro dei Piccoli*" announced: but why *Theatre for Littleones?*—it becomes clearer when we see the performance. All around is the infantile decked out in all its bows and ribbons—Comic Puppets are there on a beautiless stage—the heroine, even, is a parody—with "Actress" Eyes and "actress" ways . . . at which children wonder and others turn from wearily after that worn out jest about artless artificiality has raised the usual smile to our faces.

Not that Roma is so far behind other cities—in fact it is by no means lower than 19th in the European list—but the whole of Europe while quite well knowing what wonders lie hidden in the art of the Puppet stage lends its support only to those more pushful and least poetic of men, who see something up-to-date in the Idea, nice admirable men—I know dozens of them—but 'tis a most idiotic Europe to support them, while doing its best to destroy all Poets, all poetry, and thus all puppet-shows. And if England does this too, England like the rest of Europe will bring a loss of more than seven millions a day to her people.

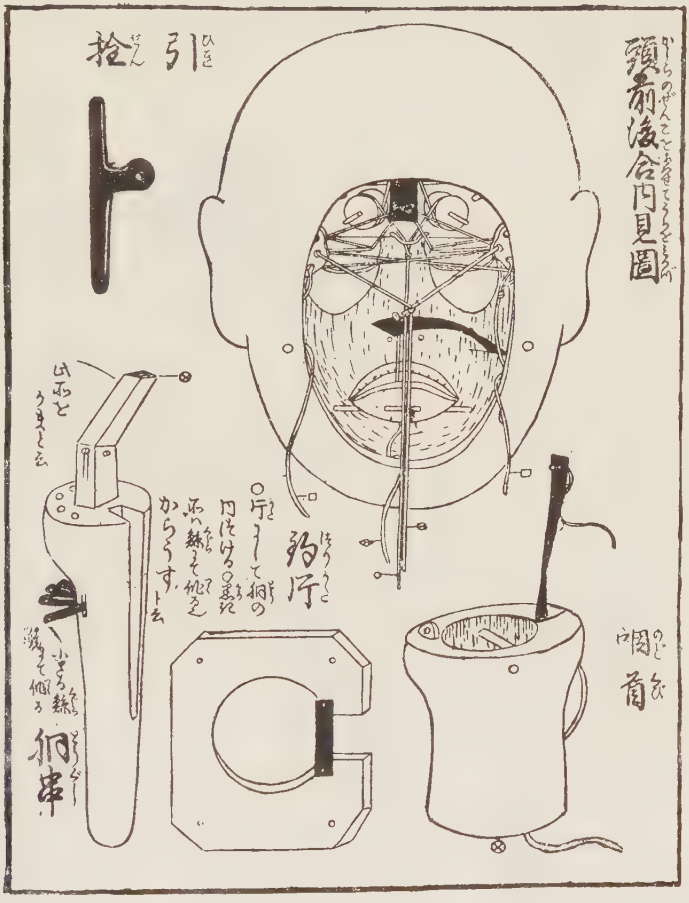
Such a statement is perhaps a little difficult for a city man to believe . . . still it's what may be exactly described as the blooming truth . . . and my sole regret is that I cannot put this truth into verse.

This figure of a Japanese Puppet is somewhat more elaborate than our European Puppets. If it serve no other purpose, it must silence those who imagine that a Puppet is something silly and not to be considered seriously as a fine means of expression.

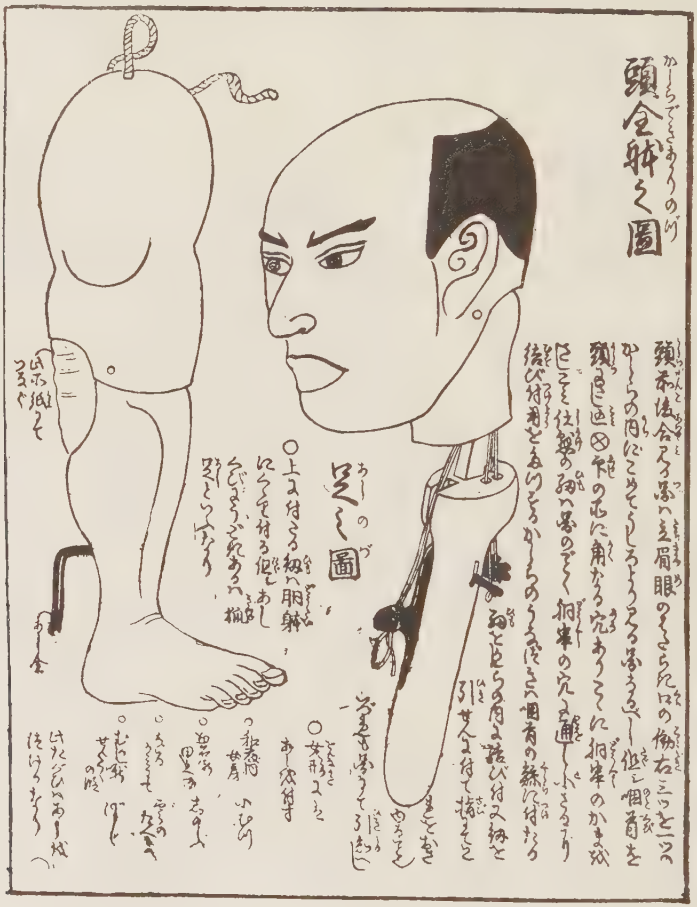
"Much too .... tires me .... the English Puppet Punch is far better" .... I hear the noble Lord .... I observe his weary eyelid .... I note his goodness and irritation struggling .... but I see this too .... I see he does nothing to preserve this same English Puppet Punch whom he is good enough to patronise .... to pat .... even to pamper—with his *words*. Whereas in Japan their lordships never fail to help—and are the real friends of the impertinent artist.

My Lord, won't you let Mr. Lloyd George rest a bit and turn into Battersea Park one day, and there like a man chat it over with Mr. John Burns and both of you do something for .... the People's children.

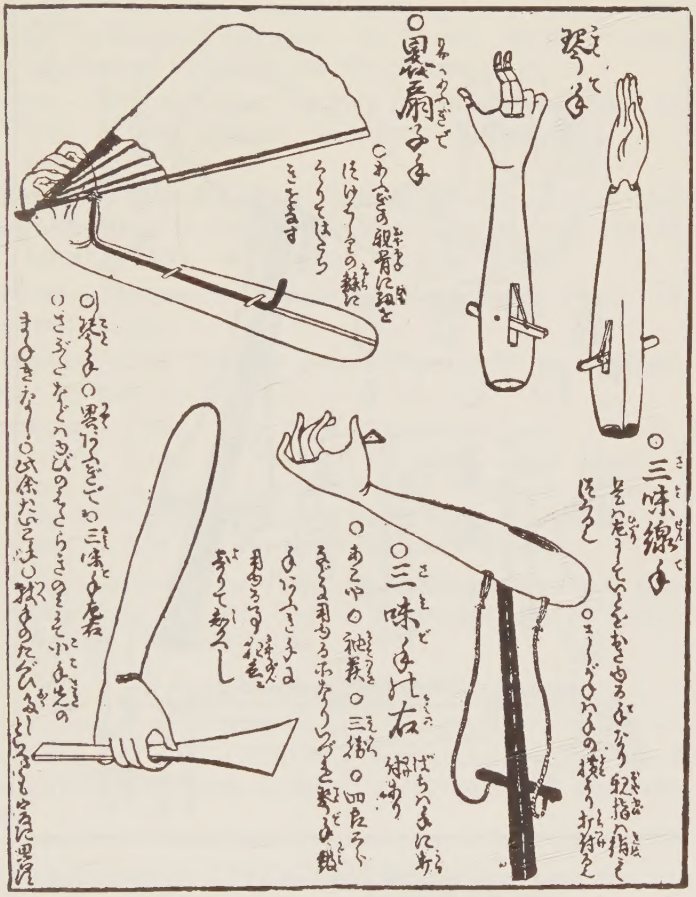
The Japanese Puppet can have a number of heads . . . . but of course that costs more, so lest I offend I had better drop the subject. But I once more would suggest that a visit to Battersea Park one fine Spring morning—with Mr. Burns . . . . and cheque-book in pocket . . . . and Mr. Clunn Lewis' address is ' care of Miss Ellen Terry, 215, King's Road, Chelsea. . . . . '



The more I think of these Japanese marvels the more I am forced to speak of our old Mr. Clunn Lewis. It occurs to me here to say that as he is past 70 years of age you must not, my Lord, leave it entirely to him to do all the work. We all know that he can work . . . . I would suggest that it is time to assist. He would need . . . . let me see . . . . 5, 6, put it at 8 assistants. Is this too much to ask for some one not Japanese, not even Russian. No, but I mean this . . . . and I mean it without offence. It is obvious . . . . too obvious . . . . that our English Puppetry could save much we wish to see saved if only . . . . . Battersea Park . . .



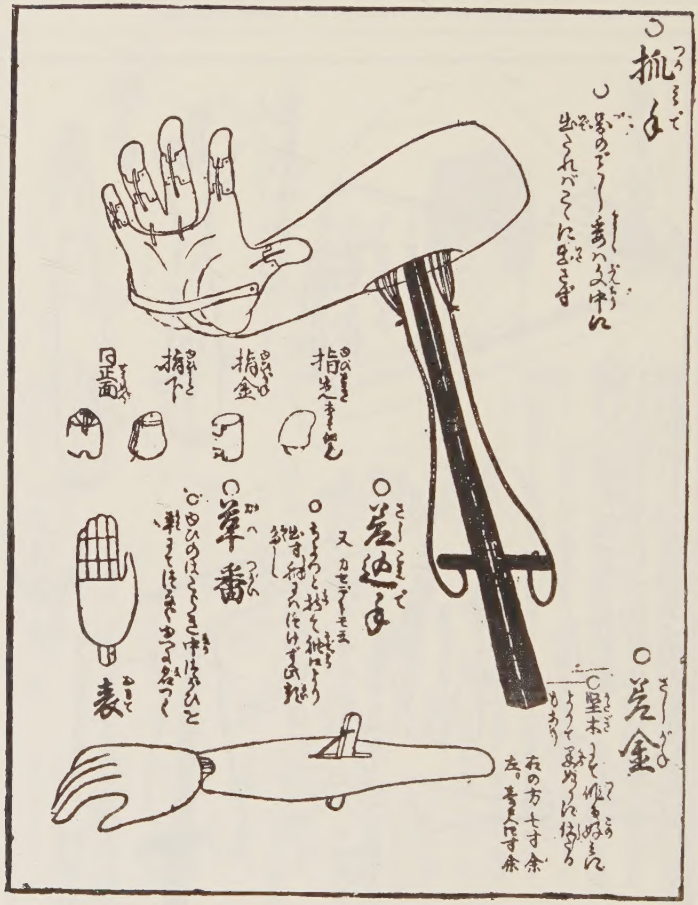
Last June . . . . what this has to do with Fans and arms goodness knows . . . . I was by some miracle conducted into the presence of Mr. Clunn Lewis and Mr. John Burns . . . . I found them together . . . . I was looking at a plate . . . . raised my head . . . . and there sat the great J.B. and Mr. Lewis. I can't pull wires . . . . I have no talent whatever . . . . but the Gods do. I am speaking here to men but the Gods overhear us . . . . and I want to see Mr. Lewis installed in a large and well equipt Puppet Play house in Battersea Park by next JUNE. June, 1921. I want Mr. Burns to bring this about. I want his Lordship to be good enough to help. *Which* Lordship? you ask. . . . . Any genuine one who will listen to the person who I anticipate will draw his notice to these notes. Do not laugh. To laugh is too easy. Laugh after you have restored the Puppets to England.



What a forbidding gesture—

it really robs me of all I was about
to say—

it somehow tells me once
more to repeat—pleadingly and quickly—
the words BATTERSEA PARK . . . .



and this last figure, this lowest hand,
almost seems preparing to
shake another hand.

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